

Formed for God's Family
40 Days of Purpose
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We continue this morning along the path of our 40 Days of Purpose journey. In the first week, we learned that we were created by God to be loved by God, and last week we discovered that one of our purposes is to love God in return by offering our lives to God as an act of worship. Today, we'll explore how we were created to be together, that we were formed for God's family.

Last week we looked at the verse in Mark where Jesus answers the question about the greatest commandment: to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But that's only the first half. He then follows that up with the command to love your neighbor as yourself. We were created to love God, and we were created to love each other.

This is especially important today as we continue to see an increase in time-saving technology. I'm simply amazed at what's being accomplished. Places that used to require you to stand in line and deal with unpredictable human beings are now making it possible for you to zip in and zip out. The Post Office now has an automated machine where you can buy stamps and send packages without ever talking to an employee. Isn't that amazing? Grocery stores now have self-checkout lanes, so you can avoid standing in line and waiting on the cashier. Of course, we're all veterans of time-savers like ATM machines and self-service gas pumps that take credit cards. We're accustomed to drive-through restaurants and banks that keep our interactions to a minimum. We can do all our shopping online, and expedite our phone calls with their oh-so-helpful automated menus. It's amazing how much more we can get done in a day's time. Ah, progress!

What we've gained in convenience we've lost in connection. I can do my shopping, go to the bank, mail a package, buy my groceries, get gas for my car, and refill a prescription over the phone without every interacting with another human being. Ah, progress!

As this kind of technology increases, we'll continue to see an increase as well in feelings of isolation and loneliness. And that's why this purpose is so important. The fact is that people used to come together on Sunday to celebrate the community they had the rest of the week. Now people come to church on Sunday to find the community they don't have the rest of the week.

We as a church are called to be that community. It's a part of our name – Community Christian Church – but it's an even deeper part of our DNA. We were created by God to be in community with each other. In Genesis, when God is creating the world, everything created God calls "good." There's only one thing that God says is "not good." Genesis 2:18: The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." We were created for community.

The Bible tells that story over and over again. The entire Bible is the story of God building a family, from Adam and Eve to Jacob and his sons to Moses and the Israelites to Jesus and his disciples. God created us to be connected to each other.

We carry on that biblical tradition by gathering together as a church. One of the biblical metaphors that describes believers is a "family." Jesus talks about this in the two Gospel readings this morning. By virtue of our baptism, we have been welcomed into the

family of God. Rick Warren says that a child is born into the universal family of human beings, but must be part of a specific family to receive nurture and care and to grow healthy and strong. So we as believers are part of God's universal family, but must also become part of a specific church family in order to progress on our journey of faith.

I think a family is a great way to understand a church that's dedicated to worshipping God. In a true family, acceptance isn't based on how smart or beautiful or talented you are. It's based on the fact that you belong to each other. We've all got that one relative who ends up providing all the memorable stories from the family reunion. We probably wouldn't choose to be related to this relative, but we're related to just the same. Well, a church is made up of quite a cast of characters, as well. One of my mentor's favorite sayings is, "It takes all kinds to make a church." It does, thank God.

Being a family together is about more than just acceptance. It's about helping each other, supporting each other, being accountable to each other. You cannot grow in your faith in isolation. It's simply impossible. Warren says, "Love cannot be learned in isolation. You have to be around people – irritating, frustrating, imperfect people." That's the church!

The lady who cuts my hair and I often get into theological discussions along these lines. She claims that she's a Christian, but doesn't go to church. I told her that's impossible, but I do so gently, because she usually has scissors in her hands. That just doesn't make sense. The church is where you live out what it means to be a Christian. That's like saying, "I'm a quarterback, but I don't want to be a part of any football team." It doesn't work. That's like saying, "I'm a cook, but I don't want to be in the kitchen." A cook that never goes into a kitchen is not that much of a cook.

The simply and unavoidable fact is that we need each other. Warren says that following Christ is more than believing, it's belonging. True spiritual maturity is all about learning to love like Jesus, and you can't practice being like Jesus without being in relationship with other people. We were created to be social creatures. We need other people whether we want to need them, or think we need them, or not. There's an African saying that goes, "I am because you are." You were made for other people and they were made for you. You were formed to be a part of the family of God.

This is where another biblical metaphor for the church comes into play. It's the idea that the church is the "body of Christ." We heard Paul give that extensive treatment in our passage from 1 Corinthians. We are all part of the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. If your body doesn't have a head, you're probably not going to get very far. We all need Christ as the head of our life and the head of this church. But Christ also needs us to do his work here on earth. We are Christ's hands and feet. We are the body.

Part of the joy of belonging to a church is realizing how much we can learn from each other. Nobody knows everything. We're all ignorant, just on different subjects. So you know some things I don't know and I know some things you don't know. And the person next to you knows some things neither of us knows. Think of all the wealth of knowledge sitting here right now in this room. Think about how much we could learn from each other if we spent time together. We know how to deal with children on drugs and financial struggles, we know how to work our way through divorces and job loss and illness and death. We need each other for support and growth as we struggle to live out the purposes to which God has called us. We need each other.

Have you ever jammed your thumb? It hurts! I jammed mine once playing volleyball, and I was out of commission for a couple of days. Couldn't write, couldn't type, couldn't get my own drink from the refrigerator (or so I led my mom to believe). Who would think that such a small part was so important? If the foot isn't working, we can't walk straight. If the eye isn't working, we can't see straight. There's no part of the body of Christ that isn't needed. We each have something to give, and we each have something to gain. If even one part isn't working, the body is not complete.

The flipside of this is that, just as the body needs each part, each part needs the body. My grandma used to pick up the National Enquirer when I was a kid. And I was always fascinated by the idea that somewhere, deep in the recesses of the White House, President Kennedy's brain was being kept alive in a jar. I desperately wanted to tour the White House so I could sneak away and find JFK's brain. But then one day I realized, "What good is that? What good is the brain without the body?" I quickly lost my desire to visit the White House. If the part is working, but it isn't connected to the body, then it's not fulfilling its purpose.

We live in a society where people are experiencing increased isolation and disconnectedness. There are a lot of souls out there looking for a body to which they can belong. And wouldn't you know it, the Bible tells us that we are a body.

One of the lines of our mission statement says that we are called to welcome people into a loving and caring church family. As a community of Christians, we have an enormous opportunity. People are hungry for relationships. They are starving to belong, to experience the kind of love we have to give. Warren says that everyone needs and wants to be loved, and when people find a church where members genuinely love and care for each other, you would have to lock the doors to keep them away.

Your purpose, one of the reasons you were put here on earth, is to be in this place, with these people, forming this body. We may not be perfect, but we don't have to be. To fulfill God's purpose for us, what we do have to be is together, as God's family, as a group of believers, as Christ's body. We are called to be Community. We are called to be Christian. We are called to be Church.